

# THE ALABAMA POWER COMPANY AND CONSERVATION

By RICHARD L. SCOTT

Conservation of the natural resources was paramount in the dreams and ideals of our Company's founders. Many years ago the waters of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers went wasting away to the sea. Each year inestimable tons of valuable top soil was churned through miles of rocky shoals, lost forever from farms and woodlands alike. In some sections along the Coosa, navigation was only possible during such floods. History shows that such floods had no set seasonal pattern. There has been a flood during every month of the year with the exception of September. As the founders of the Alabama Power Company watched these wasteful floods, the idea was conceived to check this powerful run off by constructing a dual purpose hydro electric dam. This was a means to ease man's burden, make life more comfortable, and to reduce the devastating floods.

After more than fifty years of service, the Company has grown to six hydro electric dams and four additional dams on the Coosa River are to be completed by 1968. Upon completion of the new dams there will be navigable pools from Wetumpka to Rome, Georgia, a distance of about three hundred miles.

We of the Alabama Power Company, an investor owned corporation, consider ourselves as good citizens of our state and strive to work toward developing our area in every way. As such, no attempt has ever been made to enumerate or evaluate cooperative measures of advancing the general status of our service community. This became apparent when material for this paper was requested. Conservation matters carried out in whole or through cooperative efforts with schools, sportsmen, farmers, the State Conservation Department, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service or others have been done because they seemed to be the most prudent and the best thing to do. We do not attempt to set a pattern for others in the industry to follow. In some locations and industries it may be impracticable to assume the point of view of the Alabama Power Company.

Since the construction of Lay Dam in 1914, our first impoundment, the fishermen, the hunters and picnickers have been welcome to the use of Company lands. Today, as through the past, the recreationists are welcomed and encouraged to enjoy the use of the Company's approximately 100,000 acres of timber lands and 59,324 acres of reservoirs. Upon the completion of our present construction in 1968, there will be approximately 145,000 acres of reservoir fishing waters available to the fishing public. Our Land Department is responsible for the carrying out of a full-time recreation development program. The primary purpose of this program is to promote the recreational use of all impoundments. Our activities include the leasing of private, club youth and commercial sites, the provision of free public access points, cooperating with sporting clubs in giving use of grounds for races and rodeos, sponsoring an annual fishing contest, working with and assisting conservation clubs and others in the interest of small game, wild fowl and fish, assisting private land owners in the development of their lakeshore property and promoting water safety.

The leasing of lakeshore cottage sites is the only service in which a charge is made. All sites are leased on long-termed agreements and the annual rental is nominal. We have minimum building specifications whereby the licensee is asked to construct a cottage of good building materials, use good workmanship and install a state approved septic tank and field drain. Most people desire this type of cottage and the specifications merely serve as an assurance that the next door neighbor will build a comparable house with basic sanitary facilities. The success of our subdivisions has created far reaching effects on stimulating the sale of private sites and generally raising building standards on all lakes.

Often a fisherman may take a dim view of a boat race. Whatever your individual viewpoint may be boat racing is a healthful, multipurpose activity for reservoirs. They serve their purpose for the boat racing enthusiast and regulate racing according to good rules and boating practices. Organized boat racing tends to focus activities in a given area, thus giving the fishing interest undis-

turbed waters. We feel that perhaps one of the most important results of boat racing is the wide volume publicity for the reservoirs. Many fishermen are attracted to a good fishing lake through the tub thumping of a boat race.

We are eager to give the use of lands for boat races. Often we are invited to serve in various capacities as field judges, rescue and others. On Lake Jordan we have surveyed outboard courses and inboard courses accepted by the American Power Boat Association for official records.

For ten years, the Alabama Power Company Fishing Contest served as a guide to introduce the fishing public to the wonderful fishing of the Coosa and Tallapoosa impoundments. Trophies, cash prizes and whopper catcher awards did much to attract fishermen. The important tool of attraction was education and information. Through our weekly news release we won the full cooperation of the sports editors throughout the lakes area. On numerous occasions full pages of pictures and maps were carried in the state's largest newspapers. Radio and TV stations joined in the spirit of spreading the good fishing news and the names of all six reservoirs became familiar to the fishing public. Our fishing contest was a success and served its purpose well. During the past several years, we have participated in radio broadcasts, an occasional TV appearance, and have sent to newspapers, semiweekly, news of what's being caught, where, and method used.

Large tracts of woodlands are allocated to the State Conservation Department, County Conservation and Sportsmen Clubs for game management programs. Often we are called on to participate actively in the functions of these groups.

Private developers of lakeshore properties are aware of our noncompetitive recreational programs and often request our service in subdivisinal problems. As an aid to dispose of their sites, we are furnished with plot plans. Information and ideas gathered through our efforts to keep abreast are gladly passed on to interested developers.

In future years when the lakeshores are fully developed, unless someone acts now, there will be few access points for public use. Recognizing this possibility, we are reserving various sites on all lakes. Several public access areas have been developed and are being used by large numbers of sportsmen. Launching ramps, picnic tables, barbecue, and other facilities have been prepared for the purpose on most lakes.

Water Safety promotion is one of our most important activities. The organization of rescue squads, Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla and boating clubs represent outstanding highlights in our program. We serve actively in several such organizations. From time to time we prepare and distribute thousands of booklets pointing out the safe rules of the aquatic road. Much informative material furnished to us by the National Water Safety Congress, the American National Red Cross, the Outboard Boating Club of America and others is distributed to public gathering points about the lakes.

Since early in the history of Alabama Power Company, the values of good forestry have been recognized and practiced. The thousands of acres of timberland are under the competent supervision of a large staff of graduate foresters. We are among the first in the state to be awarded the certificate of Good Forestry Practice by the State Chamber of Commerce. The deadly effects of soil erosion on the impoundment watersheds brought about the establishment of several long leaf, loblolly and slash pine nurseries by the Company. Since 1935 seven and one-half million seedlings have been planted on Company lands. Six million of these were grown in a Company owned nursery before it was possible to get seedlings elsewhere.

In recent years we have diverted tree trimming crews from their regular duties to go out on the various impoundments to cut and remove stumps and snags dangerous to fishermen, boaters, and swimmers. This work is usually done on occasions when the lakes are drawn exceptionally low to permit repairs in the lower element of the upstream dam. Also, in recent years our operational draw down has been regulated, when possible, mindful of spawning fish and recreationist.

Thousands of color map folders of the lakes have been prepared and distributed among the fishermen. Nevertheless, there are still those who find it difficult to

find their way about the lakes. There is a legal point which prevents the Company from erecting signs indicating dangerous navigational hazards and direction markers. However, through cooperation with the boating clubs such signs have been erected.

Each year thousands of outdoor men request hunting permits to hunt on Company property. These permits are given upon request in compliance to a state hunting regulation which requires the hunter to possess a written permit on all lands.

We in Alabama are fortunate to have an outstanding State Department of Conservation. This corps of trained experts are constantly working in the interest of Alabama's bountiful natural resources. Our relations with the Conservation Department are most agreeable and friendly. We are usually invited to observe and participate in scientific fish management of the impounded waters.

On numerous occasions we have worked cooperatively with the Conservation Department in making fish population field studies, applying fish management technique, selling good fisheries to the public, investigations of marginal planting possibilities, studies of practical transmission lines right-of-way planting, preparing public access areas and other matters designed to improve the intrinsic values of fish and wildlife in our State.

Since 1949 we have taken an active part in the work that goes with making fish population studies. Spot checks have been made on all Coosa River impoundments as well as Lake Martin on the Tallapoosa River. As a result of these studies it was determined the general health and abundance of the species present. Preparation was then made to improve these conditions. It was found that restocking was not the answer.

A good brood stock of desired game fish was present and an over abundance of rough fishes were found in the reservoirs. Most of the game fishes were undersized and needed food. It was decided to introduce threadfin shad to Lake Martin as a food supplement for the sport fish. In cooperation with the State Conservation Department, several thousand threadfins were taken from the tail-race of Mitchell Dam and transported and distributed in Lake Martin. There was a relative small survival resulting from this painstaking task but later checks proved that reproduction was widespread. Since the threadfin has become established, fishing in Lake Martin, particularly for black bass, white bass, and crappie, has greatly improved.

A measure to alleviate the over population of rough fishes condition was to introduce commercial fishing. Very often this type of fishing meets with strong local opposition. Through our news releases, radio and company organ we endeavor to show the need for this type of fish removal.

On one occasion we met with members of a wildlife club armed with bows and arrows and went out on a gar hunting expedition. This group made several other excursions to Lake Lay with only mild results.

At the request of the Jefferson County Sportsman's Association we met with Conservation Department representatives and investigated possible areas for marginal planting of wildfowl foods on Lakes Lay and Mitchell. Unfavorable conditions proved this program unfeasible for desired results. Plans are now being made to plant additional transmission line rights of way.

Recently, several areas on Company lands were investigated for the purpose of the construction of public access points by the Conservation Department. Plans call for two rows of ten foot pre-cast slabs placed side by side to make a twenty-foot launching ramp. Access roads, parking area, picnic tables and barbecue pits will be included in the program. The lands will be furnished by the Power Company and the improvements will be furnished by the Conservation Department. All areas are to be available to the public free of charge.

Serving the general public presents certain problems which, sometimes, can be minimized by cooperative efforts. Our plant operation was plagued with fishermen throwing hooks and lead sinkers through power house windows. This presented a most hazardous working condition. As a result gates were installed blocking the access to below the dam fishing. Fishing the turbulent waters below dams has long been recognized as dangerous for fishermen and the gates seemed to be the answer to discourage this practice. However, the gates were soon

removed at the request of the Conservation Department. A cable was erected across the power house windows to catch misguided sinkers, a street light, trash burners and a sign of welcome put the dam fishermen back in business.

We have recently received a preliminary report of a study made by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on our proposed Weiss impoundment. The report embraces fishing, boating and wildlife on the new 30,600-acre reservoir and indicates most favorable prospects for recreationist. Plans for public access development, waterfowl management and selective timber clearing are recommended for maximum impoundment benefits. Five or six subimpoundments for raising fish will be constructed in selected coves this year. The Company underwrote a substantial expense for this study because it was felt that the Fish and Wildlife Service was equipped to produce the ultimate guide for maximum recreational benefits.

The purpose of the Alabama Power Company's existence is to manufacture, transmit, and sell electricity. But our slogan, "Helping Develop Alabama" implies an interest in many fields, not the least of which is intelligent conservation and utilization of natural resources.

## CONSERVATION AGENCIES AND THE CHEMICALS INDUSTRY

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The field of wildlife conservation is probably unique in the interested public that follows it. This public is quick to praise good work but equally quick to condemn questionable activities. This interested public must be served. As interested citizens they have a right to know. Also, failure to inform this interested public can give us our "one buck laws" in circumstances where what really is needed is additional gun pressure to balance game productivity with the ecology of the land.

Gaining this understanding would seem to be one of the biggest problems facing information staffs of the various conservation agencies. And it would constitute one of the biggest services that could be rendered by outdoor writers.

The question of public understanding of the conservationist's methods is not growing simpler. As a matter of fact, it is growing much more complex. This growing complexity follows the increased use of new and—from the layman's viewpoint—rather startling methods of wildlife management.

Actually, "conservation" has become something of a misnomer in describing the work of game and fish departments today. To conserve means to protect or to guard. In many cases game technicians do maintain or protect wild lands in their natural state. But more and more they are called on to build or to create good habitat in circumstances where it does not exist. They are called on to develop habitat for game species that were not indigent to the area. They are called on to reconstruct good habitat after an area has been ruined; either naturally or through human neglect.

In addressing this sort of job the game technician is starting more and more to use tools of industry. And in developing these tools and in explaining their operations to the interested public is an area where industry and wildlife conservation people can and should work closely together to develop the best results.

The Dow Chemical Company is proud to have been a part of this movement developing scientific means of helping wild game. We are perhaps best known for our role in the program of the Fish and Wildlife Service to combat the sea lamprey in the Great Lakes.

The lamprey is an eel-like fish sprung from a family predating the dinosaur. As canals were opened to link the Great Lakes, the lamprey moved in to prey on fish life. Soon the fishermen started beaching their boats and hanging up their nets.